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SUBJECT: THE AGHA KHAN TRIES TO SOLVE ELECTORAL IMPASSE

Classified By: Ambassador Karl Eikenberry for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary and Comment. The very well-informed Aga Khan told assembled ambassadors 14 October that he had met separately with President Karzai and leading opposition candidate Abdullah Abdullah, and had told them that the political process in Afghanistan has failed. He urged the two candidates to establish a common program for Afghanistan and then create a government designed to implement it. Attending ambassadors applauded his engagement and suggested the Ismaili leader follow up with President Karzai, emphasizing the need to respect the electoral process. Ambassador Eikenberry added that discussions with both candidates have gone forward on a broad range of issues that should contribute to a common program that the Aga Khan might use for specifics in his follow up discussions. With his access and the high level of assistance the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) affords to Afghanistan, the Aga Khan is a serious voice that Afghans, including Hamid Karzai, respect and listen to. End Summary and Comment.

¶2. (U) Background: The Agha Khan became Imam of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims in 1957. He is the 49th hereditary Imam of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims and a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad though his cousin and son-in-law Ali, the first Imam, and his wife Fatima, the Prophet Muhammad's daughter. The Ismailis live in 25 countries, mainly in West and Central Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and North American and Western Europe. The Aga Khan was born on December 13, 1936, in Geneva. He grew up in Kenya and attended school in Switzerland. He graduated from Harvard University in 1959 with a BA Honors Degree in Islamic history. He is Director of the AKDN, which focuses on health, education, culture, rural development, institution-building, and the promotion of economic development. The AKDN's Afghanistan program includes large-scale rural development, health, education, and civil society programs; microfinance; rehabilitation of historic neighborhoods; the Babur Gardens in Kabul; the Roshan mobile phone network; and, the renovation of the five-star Serena hotel in Kabul. End Background.

¶3. (C) On 14 October the Aga Khan met with Ambassadors of the United States (Eikenberry and Carney), France, UK, India, Pakistan, Germany, EU, and the Commander of International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF). The Aga Khan's representative, Ali Mawji, organized the event. After presentations by the assembled guests that generally emphasized Afghanistan's perilous security and political conditions, the Aga Khan embarked on an informative tour d' horizon, including details of his suggestions following earlier meetings with President Karzai and Dr. Abdullah. The Aga Khan focused on three main concerns: the role of

Afghanistan's neighbors and opportunities to gain support from them; regional perceptions of the development future of Afghanistan; and, his assessment of the current political situation here.

14. (C) Underscoring the important role of Afghanistan's neighbors, the Aga Khan assessed to the diplomats that each of the presidential candidates could draw on possible support from their circles of neighboring friends. Regarding his regional perceptions of the development future of Afghanistan, he emphasized that its provinces are in different stages of development, and therefore, will need varying approaches to development. This is particularly critical for border provinces that share ethnic groups across frontiers. He questioned whether Afghanistan's neighbors share his analysis. A common regional view is necessary in order to reach consensus on cross-frontier development -- a concept which has already worked in Badakshan province where the lesson of cross-frontier ethnicity has proved crucial.

15. (C) Security is another essential precondition because ethnic groups must feel safe, the Ismaili leader stated. To succeed, one must assess conditions at the frontiers, paying particular attention to ethnic group demography in these border areas, including the viability of working with each group. In his view, irrespective of the election results, we must "drive hard" on development wherever we can. He asked COMISAF to keep an eye on security in the north and the west, both "areas of promise."

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16. (C) The Aga Khan's third point centered on the political situation. The Aga Khan explained that he had solicited Karzai's and Abdullah's views on the future of the country in the face of a failed political process. He recounted that he had advised both candidates that, regardless of the election outcome, they should work together. The Aga Khan had urged them to devise a common agenda for the next three to five years, which would require promptly establishing communications to discuss their program. The key element to the program would be appointing competent people in the key ministries.

17. (C) The Agha Kahn had also asked them to consider whether, in the event a second round was required, would it be in Afghanistan's best interest to hold Parliamentary elections scheduled for next spring? Given the high level of risk entailed in holding two elections within a ten-month period, he had urged the two candidates to consider avoiding this scenario. The Aga Khan believed the candidates are aware that they should assume some responsibility over this matter, but he was uncertain whether their role would be positive or negative.

18. (C) In his presentation, the Agha Kahn mentioned his awareness that the Afghan Constitution does not allow for a prime minister; whatever position Abdullah would occupy must be constitutional and must factor in parliamentary sensitivities. He concluded to his Afghan interlocutors that this is a matter the Afghans must resolve, suggesting that establishing clear goalposts would lend structure to this tenuous period and reduce the centrifugal tendencies of Afghanistan's political class. He took on board without comment the French Ambassador's suggestion that a "Senior Minister" be named who could perform the role of a PM, without the title, but that ensuring parliamentary acceptance would be vital.

19. (C) In response to questions and observations, the Aga Khan noted that he does not favor changing the Constitution. Rather, the new government should be allowed to first function long enough to build momentum. Later there would be time to discuss the Constitution. In this context, the Aga Khan reiterated the critical role ethnicity plays, in

particular the cross-frontier realities of the Pashtun community. Key here is that the ethnic group looks, not at the frontier, but at themselves and their position vis-a-vis other ethnic groups. By extension, the implication of this dynamic is important for dealing with the insurgency; stabilization in the ethnic communities can assist efforts to reintegrate elements of the insurgency.

¶10. (C) Ambassador Eikenberry observed that the electoral process is on wobbly rails, with the risk of seeing things blow up, which if it does, would impact the current U.S. debate. The Aga Khan expressed concern that the two Afghan men might agree in principle, but not on a set of objectives and on an agreed program. The Ambassador then noted the existence of a detailed dialogue with both candidates about a five-year agenda. He reported that the response from both Abdullah and Karzai has been positive thus far and could serve as a basis for a common perspective that the Aga Khan might use should he follow-up with the two.
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